



# Growth Management

## Growth Management Services

### *Overview of the Growth Management Act*

## Description

In 1990 the Legislature found that “uncoordinated and unplanned growth, together with a lack of common goals... pose a threat to the environment, sustainable economic development, and the health, safety, and high quality of life enjoyed by residents of this state. It is in the public interest that citizens, communities, local governments, and the private sector cooperate and coordinate with one another in comprehensive land use planning.” (RCW 36.70A.010) This is the foundation for the Growth Management Act (GMA).



## Requirements for All Counties

The GMA requires all cities and counties in the state to:

- Designate and protect wetlands, frequently flooded areas and other critical areas.
- Designate farm lands, forest lands, and other natural resource areas.
- Determine that new residential subdivisions have appropriate provisions for public services and facilities.

## Requirements for Fully Planning Counties

In addition, 29 counties and the 218 cities within them are to plan for growth based on certain requirements. These jurisdictions represent the fastest-growing counties and the cities within them, as well as other counties, plus the cities inside their boundaries that chose to plan under the GMA.

Here are the basic steps that local governments fully planning under the GMA are to follow:

- Agree on county-wide planning policies to guide regional issues, for example, public facilities and affordable housing.
- Plan for urban growth within the urban growth areas that are adopted by each county, based on forecasts provided by the state Office of Financial Management (OFM).
- Adopt comprehensive plans with chapters that fit together.
- Identify lands useful for public purposes and essential public facilities, such as airports, educational facilities, and utility and transportation corridors.



- Adopt development regulations that carry out GMA comprehensive plans.

## GMA Goals

GMA plans and regulations are to be guided by 14 goals that are summarized below:

- Focus urban growth in urban areas.
- Reduce sprawl.
- Provide efficient transportation.
- Encourage affordable housing.
- Encourage sustainable economic development.
- Protect property rights.
- Process permits in a timely and fair manner.
- Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries.
- Retain open space and habitat areas and develop recreation opportunities.
- Protect the environment.
- Encourage citizen participation and regional coordination.
- Ensure adequate public facilities and services.
- Preserve important historic resources.
- Manage shorelines wisely.



## Comprehensive Plans and Regulations

The comprehensive plans are to provide for 20 years of growth and development needs based on forecasts of OFM. They can be amended once a year. State agencies are required to comply with local comprehensive plans. Newly incorporated cities have four years from the date of incorporation to adopt plans. Local comprehensive plans are to include the required chapters below:

- Land Use
- Utilities
- Housing
- Transportation
- Capital Facilities
- Rural (for counties only)
- Shorelines

Plans must be put in action by development regulations, for example, for zoning and concurrency.

When plans and regulations are developed, they are submitted to CTED for review. However, the department does not certify the plans or approve the regulations. Plans are presumed valid upon adoption unless a growth management hearings board finds they are not in compliance with the GMA.

Cities and counties fully planning under the GMA are to review their comprehensive plans and ordinances at least every seven years to see if their plans and regulations comply with the GMA. The deadline to complete this requirement varies from county to county. The earliest deadline for some counties and cities is December 1, 2004.





## Buidable Lands

Six counties, and cities and towns within their boundaries, are to establish a review and evaluation program commonly referred to as the Buidable Lands Program. The counties are King, Pierce, Snohomish, Kitsap, Thurston, and Clark.

The first reports developed by the counties under the program address whether their UGAs contain adequate development capacity to accommodate the state population forecast as well as projected employment growth for their area. Residential, commercial, and industrial land uses were analyzed. All county reports indicate that their overall UGAs have adequate capacity to meet growth demands as indicated in their adopted comprehensive plans.

## Hearings Boards

Three hearings boards, one for each region of the state, resolve disputes about whether a local government is in compliance with the GMA. The board may send a plan or regulation back to the local government for changes. In exceptional cases, where the plan or regulation would interfere significantly with the fulfillment of GMA goals, the board may invalidate all or part of a plan or regulation. A local government may amend its plan or regulation to come into compliance.



## Land Use Regulatory Reform

In 1995 new laws were passed to better connect state environmental laws with growth management and to reduce the time for issuing local development permits. Also, a Land Use Study Commission reviewed Washington's land use laws and made recommendations to the Legislature.

## Taxing Authority

Excise taxes can only be used for capital improvements specified in the capital facilities chapter of a local government's comprehensive plan. The excise tax is set at a rate of 0.25 percent on real property, and there is an option for an additional 0.25 percent with a vote of the people.

If impact fees are levied, they must "reasonably" benefit new development. These fees may only be used for: streets and roads, open space, parks and recreation, school facilities, and fire protection.

## For More Information

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## CTED Duties

CTED provides technical and financial assistance to help local governments manage growth and is required to serve as the central coordinator for state government in implementing the GMA.

Photos: Jan Meston; CTED/Rita R. Robison